

## Plot Summary

Orphaned at birth, Eliza Sommers is raised in the British colony of Valparaíso, Chile, by the well-intentioned Victorian spinster Miss Rose and her more rigid brother Jeremy. Just as she meets and falls in love with the wildly inappropriate Joaquín Andieta, a lowly clerk who works for Jeremy, gold is discovered in the hills of northern California. By 1849, Chileans of every stripe have fallen prey to feverish dreams of wealth. Joaquín takes off for San Francisco to seek his fortune, and Eliza, pregnant with his child, decides to follow him.

*Daughter of Fortune* is a sweeping portrait of an era, a story rich in character, history, violence, and compassion. In Eliza, Allende has created one of her most appealing heroines, an adventurous, independent-minded and highly unconventional young woman who has the courage to reinvent herself and to create her won destiny in a new country. A marvel of storytelling, *Daughter of Fortune* confirms once again Isabel Allende's extraordinary gift for fiction and her place as one of the world's leading writers.

## About the Author

Born in Lima, Peru, her Chilean diplomat father and her mother divorced and she lived with her mother and grandparents. She worked first as a secretary and then as a journalist in print, on television and in movie documentaries.

After the overthrow and assassination in 1973 of her uncle, Salvador Allende, president of Chile, Isabel Allende and her husband and children left for safety in Venezuela.

It was in her exile that she began to write *The House of the Spirits*, her first novel, which was based on her own family and the politics of Chile.

She continued to produce novels based in part on her own experience, often focusing on the experience of women, weaving myth and realism together.

Having become an American citizenship in 2003, she currently resides in California along with her husband.

## Topics for Discussion

1. Eliza thinks that the facts of her birth don't matter: "It is what you do in this world that matters, not how you come into it," she claims. Ta Ch'ien, on the other hand, cannot imagine "his own life apart from the long chain of his ancestors, who not only had given him his physical and mental characteristics but bequeathed him his karma. His fate, he believed, had been determined by the acts of his family before him." How do these different beliefs determine the way Tao Chi'en and Eliza make decisions about their lives? What are your own feelings about ancestry and self-determination?

2. Eliza grows up under the influence of a number of strong individuals--Mama Fresia, Rose, Jeremy Sommers and his brother, John. What does she learn from each of people? How do their differing philosophies contribute to Eliza's experience of the world? How do they shape her personality?

3. In 19th century Chile, a married woman could not travel, sign legal documents, go to court, sell or buy anything without her husband's permission. No wonder Rose doesn't

want to get married! How would the lives of the women you know be different under those conditions? What are the consequences in a society that limits the freedoms of a segments of its citizens?

4. What do you think Allende means by referring to Eliza as a "daughter of fortune?" How are the different definitions of the word "fortune" significant in Eliza's story and the novel as a whole?

5. How is Tao Chi'en a "son" of fortune? What are the crucial turning points in his life, and where do they lead him? To what extent is he responsible for his own good and bad fortunes?

6. "At first the Chinese looked on the foreigners with scorn and disgust, with the great superiority of those who feel they are the only truly civilized beings in the universe, but in the space of a few years they learned to respect and fear them." writes Allende about the arrival of Western peoples into Hong Kong. How is this pattern of suspicion, fear, and resigned acceptance repeated throughout the novel? How does Allende illustrate the confusion of clashing cultures in Valparaiso, on board Eliza's ship, and in California?

Do you think people of today are more tolerant of other cultures than they were 150 years ago?

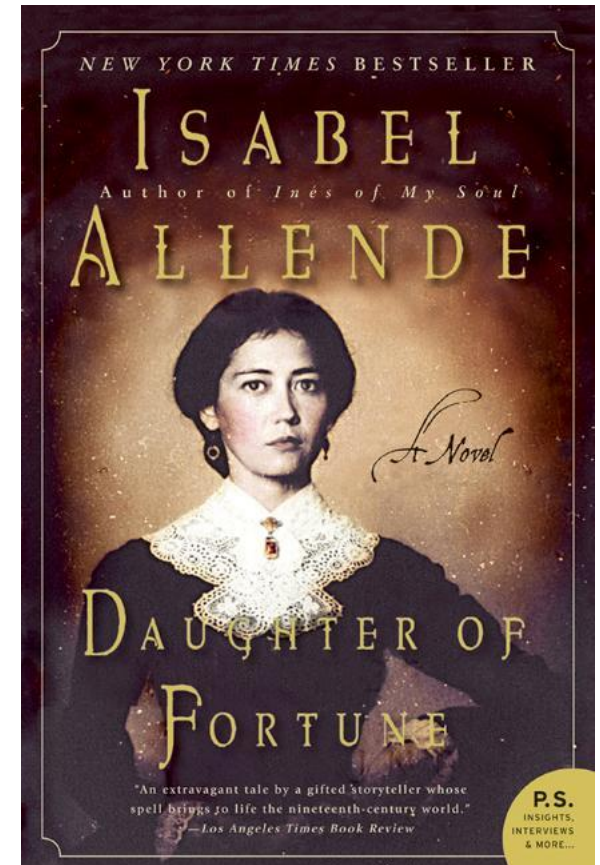
7. While Eliza is vulnerable in California because of her sex, Tao Chi'en's prospects are limited because of his race. How do both characters overcome their "handicaps?" What qualities help them make their way in a culture that is foreign and often unwelcoming?

8. What do details such as Mama Fresia's home remedies and her attempts to "cure" Eliza of her love for Joaquín, or Tao Chi'en's medical education and his habit of contacting his dead wife say about the role of the spiritual in the everyday life? Must the spiritual and the secular remain separate? What about the spiritual and scientific worlds?

9. How have the novel's characters - Rose or Jacob Todd, for instance - managed to create opportunities out of the obstacles they've faced? What do you think Allende is saying about the role that fate plays in our lives, and about our capacity to take control over our own destinies? How are we all sons or daughters of fortune?

## *Lodi Book Club*

### *Discussion*



*April 26, 2009 2- 4 pm*

*Community Room  
Lodi Police Dept.  
210 W. Elm*

*Call 333-5503 for more information*